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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 001680

SIPDIS

NSC STAFF FOR SINGH

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: JUDGES' CLUB - GOE DISPUTE LIKELY TO HEAT UP ON MARCH 17

REF: A. CAIRO 1555

[B](#). CAIRO 1009

[C](#). 05 CAIRO 3089

Classified by DCM Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (C) Summary: The March 17 national meeting of the Egyptian Judges' Club will likely attract significant national and international media attention, and will probably result in a defiant stance - prompted by the increasingly tense confrontation between the government and the judges' professional association. The event, and an anti-regime demonstration planned to coincide with it, could prompt clashes between protesters and security forces on the 17th. Relations between this key interest group and the GOE have been sour for a year now, and went sharply downhill during the flawed parliamentary elections in late 2005 and their aftermath. Though the Judges' Club leadership has attracted much attention through its strident public demands for democratization and political reform, critics charge the leaders with cynicism and selfish political aims. End summary.

[2](#). (SBU) The General Assembly of Egypt's Judges' Club will be held in Cairo on March 17. The meeting will attract significant attention in the domestic and international media. The meeting will likely conclude with a communique harshly critical of the government's handling of last fall's parliamentary elections, its perceived retaliations against judges who exposed electoral fraud and rigging, and the GOE's overall support for democratic and political reforms. Significant security force deployments sighted near the meeting venue by poloff on March 16, and reports that the protest movement Kifaya is planning an anti-regime demonstration to coincide with the Club meeting, suggest the possibility of clashes between activists and security forces on March 17.

[3](#). (C) While the Judges' Club generally functions as a union/professional association for Egypt's judges, many argue that the Club's leadership can not claim to represent the views of the broader judiciary. It is not clear how many of Egypt's roughly 9,000 judges actively participate in the Club's activities. The Judges' Club has not registered under Law 84/2002, which governs NGOs, and thus technically is not a legally recognized entity. The Judges' Club has been locked in an increasingly tense confrontation with the GOE since it began lobbying for a new judiciary law exactly one year ago (ref C). The judges threatened to abstain from their duties as poll supervisors during the fall 2005 elections if the GOE failed to curb rigging and intimidation of voters and guarantee judicial independence through a new draft law. Though the judges did not carry through with their threat, the Judges' Club released in October a report scathingly critical of the GOE's management of the September presidential polls.

[4](#). (C) Pro-GOE judges we know have criticized the Club's leadership for cynically exploiting the rhetoric of democracy and political reform in service of their own quests for power, influence, and money. Most of the junior judges supporting the Club leadership are not attracted by democratic rhetoric so much as they are by promises of better salaries and benefits, pro-GOE judges maintain. Others have charged that key members of the Club leadership, such as Ahmed Mekky and Mahmoud Khodeiry (ref A) are Muslim Brotherhood sympathizers. (Comment: We can neither confirm nor rule out these alleged MB sympathies, though common sense would suggest that a cross-section Egyptian judges, like wider Egyptian society, would reveal significant support for the MB. End comment.)

[5](#). (C) Relations between the Club and the state, strained since March 2005 (ref C), became even more sour during the November-December parliamentary elections, which were marred by widespread rigging and vote-buying, intimidation of voters by thugs, and security force blockages of polling places. Many judges who participated in the polls, particularly activists in the club, filed official fraud complaints, while others went directly to the media with their tales of intimidation and vote-rigging.

[6](#). (C) The Judges' Club elected a new leadership in December,

just after the parliamentary elections. Pro-government candidates were easily defeated by Judge Zakariya Abdel Aziz, an outspoken GOE critic, who won the national organization's top spot, and like-minded judges who assumed the leadership of local chapters, particularly in Cairo and Alexandria. The Ministry of Justice allegedly responded to these results by blocking the GOE subsidy used for the upkeep of Judges' Club premises.

17. (C) The confrontation entered a new phase in mid-February when key activists within the Judges' Club received subpoenas from prosecutors investigating charges that they had slandered their colleagues by going public with their complaints of electoral fraud (ref B). The number of judges now facing investigation has reportedly increased to eight.

18. (C) This tactic was widely perceived as an escalation by the GOE, intended to intimidate the most activist judges and dissuade rank-and-file members of the Club from supporting them. In their discussions with us, Judges' Club activists have confidently predicted that this approach will backfire against the GOE, while admitting that they were worried that their own careers, and livelihoods, might be sacrificed.

RICCIARDONE